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## DESPOTISM IN LUNATIC ASYLUMS.

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OF all the afflictions which appeal to human justice and sympathy, none is so anomalous, none so little understood, none so threatening, as insanity. Experts dispute about its definition. Mystery hangs over its cause. Grave doubts obstruct its cure. The common people are perplexed whether to regard it as a mysterious disgrace, a natural disease, or an avenging dispensation of Providence. Judges and juries, in dealing with it, are lost in mazes of metaphysics and in masses of conflicting opinions. Thrust into forbidding poor-houses, or masked and guarded in great asylums, no wonder it has been so little comprehended or cared for by the average good citizen. But now, as never before in this country, it is arresting the thoughts of statesmen and moving the hearts of philanthropists. And none too soon. For while science and benevolence, by setting limits to disease and affliction, have extended the duration of human life; while ignorance and crime have diminished, and education has become more extended and profound, insanity, and insanity alone among our great afflictions, has become both more frequent and more fatal in this country.

Two States are fairly representative. The commissioners' report of the insane in Massachusetts, for 1879, declares that "every year presents marked evidence of the increase of insanity." There are about 5000 insane in the State. The chronic or incurable cases are now more than three-fourths of the whole, and are steadily increasing. The cost of caring for the lunatics of the State (exclusive, we think, of investment in asylums and lands) is now almost a million of dollars a year; and, like the number of the insane, advances in a ratio greater than either population or wealth. In New York, the insane—estimated at 5032 in 1871, at 7921 in 1877, at 9015 in 1879—had, in 1880, reached 9543, in

its various institutions. Making ample allowance for the more complete collection of the lunatics into asylums and poor-houses, we, here also, have a ratio of increase far in excess of that of population. "The rapid increase of insanity is truly alarming," says the last message of Governor Cornell. The one disease that is worse than all others—which takes from man what most distinguishes him from the brutes—defies our remedies, and threatens our national progress.

Palatial asylums, constructed and furnished at an expense unparalleled in the world, and consigned to the almost absolute control of asylum doctors and trustees, have utterly failed to check the disease. Erected in the hope of supplying the needs of a generation, they barely hold the additions to the insane made during the very years of their construction. Year by year, since their completion, insanity has more frequently blighted our children, more broadly stricken middle life, more irresistibly tended to become chronic, more rapidly and certainly carried its victims to the grave. Well-informed alienists even declare that from five-sixths to nine-tenths of all lunatics now in American asylums are incurable. There seems to be no other country in which the facts appear so alarming.

In whatever degree the cause of insanity may be due to our overexertion for wealth and social distinction, to our vicious indulgences, to our overstimulating climate, or to our vicious system of lunacy administration, the need of better methods of prevention and treatment are much the same. The facts in every direction are perplexing enough. The most frequent cases of insanity appear to be between the ages of thirty and fifty, and the greatest ratio of victims, except on the part of the grossly licentious and intemperate, to be among our humble laborers and the unaspiring inmates of our farm-houses; while the class whose mental work is severest supply comparatively few victims. But most serious of all are the facts that near half the cases of insanity may be traced to hereditary causes, and that, in its ever-widening range, it is poisoning the vital currents which are to flow and blight in the next generations. Humanity, statesmanship, self-preservation, therefore, require that the grave question of insanity be brought forth from the filth and politics of the poor-houses, and from the secrecy, the mystery, and the professional metaphysics of the asylums and the doctors, and set up in the forum of public debate and criticism. It is none too soon

that, this year, a national association for "the protection of the insane and the prevention of insanity" has been formed; that, at this moment, a committee of the State Senate of New York is taking voluminous testimony upon the subject, and that the mysterious abuses within the walls of our asylums and the lunatic wards of poor-houses are more and more receiving the attention of the public press.

Our subject, however, is not the causes or the perils of insanity, but the care of the insane. Want of space allows but a limited view. A very important part—the professional or medical aspects of the subject—must be excluded; and so must those rich lessons of experience which may be drawn from the history of asylum treatment, which shows a steady progress from blows, dungeons, and chains, in the time of Pinel, and from straight-waistcoats, muffs, leg-locks, and general brutality, in the time of Connolly, down to our day, when the degree of freedom from physical restraint is at once the test and the measure of good asylum management. For the same reason, no adequate discrimination can be made between the merits of particular institutions, or the systems of different States. The corruption, the brutality, the neglect, the demoralizing partisan politics, so often tolerated in our town and country poor-houses; the extravagant outlay for asylum buildings; the cruel and needless suppression of the letters of inmates to their friends and relatives; the need of isolating the chronic insane; the value of employment and amusements as curative agencies, especially as illustrated at the Vermont Asylum at Brattleboro'; the great success which has attended the discontinuance of needless restraint and punishment in some asylums in later years, and notably in the asylum at Flatbush, Long Island, under the charge of Dr. Shaw; the striking reforms which have followed public criticism and the more searching visitations by State boards of charity within the last decade;—these important matters can receive hardly more than this passing notice.

The few brief facts we can present may give some idea of what has been possible under our lunacy system, and what reforms an aroused public opinion, led by a few superintendents and philanthropists having the courage to break through that system, may be able to accomplish. The late investigation of the New York asylum for insane convicts disclosed facts that would disgrace Turkey: filth, vermin, contagious disease, food

hardly less fatal than starvation itself; two pistol-balls in the body of one inmate, fired by his superintendent; a lunatic shackled and handcuffed night and day for two months; but no records of medicine, of treatment, of punishment, or of diet! At the same time, when similar horrors were being perpetrated in city and country poor-houses, three asylum palaces were rising in the State, under plans furnished by asylum doctors and asylum trustees, that would make them cost about \$5,000,000, or at the incredible rate of \$4000 to each patient. Only last week the present superintendent of the Ward's Island Asylum gave this testimony before the committee just referred to:

"When I came on the island, I was more afraid of the keepers than the lunatics. The keepers were mostly shoulder-hitters, and they made a regular slaughter-house of the place."

The writer has just visited the Flatbush Asylum, and seen its seven hundred inmates, without apparent bruise or any restraint upon the body or limbs of one of them. Yet, it is only about a year since Superintendent Shaw, rebelling against our asylum system and its leaders, made a great bonfire of more than three hundred camisades, straps, straight-jackets, and other implements of restraint, which the former attendants had used much as they pleased. The doctor has also within that time closed more than two hundred holes, in as many bedroom-prison doors, behind which many inmates had been confined, inspected, and fed, like dangerous beasts. These room doors are now as freely open as they are in most European asylums. A leading officer in lunacy, in Massachusetts, declares "that of the \$1,500,000 required for the accommodation of four hundred and fifty patients (at Danvers), *nearly one-third was spent upon the officers' buildings*; . . . while the poor insane are not accommodated at all. . . . Within sight, almost, of the Danvers palace, in a town almshouse, I have seen an insane woman, naked and helpless, sitting in a wooden box filled with straw." Ohio and other States, if we had space, could add new counts to this humiliating indictment.

The evils referred to, except those growing directly out of the partisan spoils system of our politics, are, in the main, but legitimate consequences of our American system of asylum management. That system not only shuts out from asylum life the healthy breezes from the great ocean of public thought and sentiment, but it is in itself a prolific source of mischief. We propose

to compare it with the better system which prevails in the leading states of Europe.

Some decisive facts are beyond dispute, and we need to have a clear view of them in the outset.

1. Insanity is cosmopolitan in character and in the conditions of its successful treatment. If the success attained in any one enlightened country is not soon reached in every other, there must be some discreditable cause.

2. By the united testimony of the foremost alienists of Europe, who have visited this country, and of agents sent to study the European system by the leading States of the Union, and of the most candid American thinkers on insanity, the lunacy administration of the principal European states is decidedly more economical, more humane, and more effective for good than our own. In freedom from physical restraint, in efficiency of inspection, in publicity of management, and in regard for public opinion, their asylums, as a rule, are far in advance of those of the United States.

3. It is beyond dispute that no people are more intelligent and that none have exhibited more generosity and humanity in dealing with the insane than the people of this country.

4. It may be claimed, we think, that in no country has the medical profession more capacity for dealing with nervous diseases and all sorts of morbid conditions, including insanity itself, than in the United States.

Consistently with such facts, only these reasons can explain our second-rate lunacy administration:

*First*, That the public sentiment and intelligence have not been stirred on the subject, and that the skill of the medical profession has not been brought to bear upon the treatment of the insane. *Second*, That we have a vicious and defective system for the care of lunatics, which excludes light and wisdom from without and breeds and screens abuses within the circle of administration. We think it clear that both these causes exist. They are in a measure dependent upon each other. A deceptive and vicious system, adroitly and ably administered, has lulled and misled public opinion; screening abuses by secrecy, shutting out light by arbitrary methods, defying exposure and change by the exercise of a despotic authority which ought never to have been conferred upon the managers of asylums. It has followed, as a natural consequence of this system, rather than as

an independent cause of inferior administration, that public opinion has been suspicious but not aggressive; alarmed but not aroused to action; anxious for information, but unable to get it; ready to do a work of reform, but finding the way everywhere barricaded by those in authority under that system. Great as is the need for carrying forward the free and bold discussion of every part of the subject—now fairly opened—in public meetings, in the daily press, in reviews, and works of fiction,—as was the case in Great Britain a generation ago,—there is yet especial need that the tyrannical system, itself, should be arraigned at the bar of public opinion and clearly comprehended by the popular mind.

Let us go to the very center of the matter and compare the American system of lunacy administration with that system which in Europe has given results so superior. Only the most decisive features can be contrasted. The English system must stand for that of Europe and the New York system for that of the United States. The Revised Statutes of 1874, for governing the lunatic asylum at Utica, New York, is expressly made the model for all others in the State, and it most clearly shows the American system. There is no space for noting the difference between the poor-house and the asylum theories and methods for treating the insane. They are equally secret, arbitrary, and irresponsible, but not equally cruel or corrupt.

It is the asylums—the asylum doctors and the asylum trustees and their system—which have become a great power, alike in politics and in medicine, in the lobby of legislatures, and in the purlieus of executive chambers.

We may say that the English and American systems were substantially the same up to about 1845. The widely different conditions in the two, at this moment, have grown out of widely differing systems since that date. Let us now see what the American system is by showing the theory and method for governing the asylum at Utica.

Nine trustees, a majority of whom must reside within five miles of the asylum, are to govern it. They make such by-laws and regulations as they deem expedient. They appoint the treasurer and the superintendent. They, by approval, determine the number of employés and their salaries. They keep the only records of their own doings. They inspect their own work. They (or their subordinate, the superintendent) make all purchases. They audit their own bills. They report to the legislature the

only authorized version of their own conduct. Neither their report nor that of their subordinate, the treasurer, is required to contain such particulars as would disclose extravagance or any other abuses. As private owners of the institution, they could not have power more absolute and irresponsible. The most ordinary and essential checks upon extravagance, favoritism, and neglect are utterly wanting.

But the authority of the asylum superintendent is, if possible, more dangerous and unchecked than that of the trustees. He is an autocrat,—absolutely unique in this republic,—supreme and irresistible alike in the domain of medicine, in the domain of business, and in the domain of discipline and punishment. He is the monarch of all he surveys, from the great palace to the hen-coops, from pills to muffs and handcuffs, from music in the parlors to confinement in the prison rooms; from the hour he receives his prisoner to the hour when his advice restores him to liberty. Here is the almost incredible power given by statute to an asylum superintendent. He assigns all officers and employés to duty. He prescribes all diet and treatment. He appoints (subject to the managers' approval) as many assistants and attendants as he thinks proper. He prescribes their duties and places. He (subject to the managers' approval) fixes their compensation. He discharges any of them "at his sole discretion." He suspends any resident officers. He can give "*all orders he may judge best . . .* in every department of labor and expense." He is authorized to "maintain discipline," and "to enforce obedience" to all his own orders. He keeps the only required accounts, and the only record of his doings, "and of the entire business operations of the institution." He approves the bills he has contracted. He makes the only report of his own administration. He too is the person who gives the permit upon which his prisoners may be restored to liberty.

This unparalleled despotism—extending to all conduct, to all hours, to all food, to all medicine, to all conditions of happiness, to all connection with the outer world, to all possibilities of regaining liberty—awaits those whose commitments may easily be unjust if not fraudulent, whose life is shrouded in a secrecy and seclusion unknown beyond the walls of an insane asylum—is over prisoners the most pitiable of human beings, whose protests and prayers for relief their keepers declare, and many good people believe, no man is bound to respect! When Frederick the Great



defined his despotism as one under which he did what he was a mind to, and his subjects said what they were a mind to, his subjects were able to speak for themselves, and could make their complaints ring through the kingdom. It would be almost incredible that such authority should be conferred upon any officer in this country, had not the public for a long time supinely accepted their theories about insanity from asylum superintendents, by whom this statute was so naturally dictated in their own interests. It assumes superintendents to be saints, with whom passion, selfishness, revenge, and neglect are impossible.

It is true that the local trustees, by whom the superintendent is selected and who makes his place more secure by putting their relatives and political henchmen where they get good salaries, have a liberty and duty of inspection. But do we need to read the reciprocal compliments between the superintendents and the trustees, so prominent in their reports, to comprehend that the relations between them—involving all the secrets, the favoritism, the partisan interests, the contracts, sinecures, and profits of asylum management—are fatal to all independent or thorough inspection?

It is a part of the system that the board of trustees shall erect the asylum buildings, keeping all accounts, making all reports, auditing all bills; aided only by the advice of asylum superintendents, one of whom is to occupy stately apartments upon the grand front of the new palace. Is it any wonder that millions have been squandered on asylums and their management? Any wonder that it costs from twice to five times as much to take care of an insane person here as in Europe? Any wonder that, in New York, a board of asylum trustees at this moment stands arraigned by the comptroller of the State before the governor for wanton extravagance and other abuses? Any wonder that an incomplete asylum at Morristown, New Jersey, has cost more than \$3000, and another at Buffalo, N. Y., about \$4000 for each patient,—sums large enough to have supplied an average farm, in either State, for every person in the lunatic palace, including the wash-women and the stable-boys!

That many boards of trustees, had they experience beyond that of their own asylum, would rise above the temptation of this irresponsible and vicious system, we may well believe. It is creditable to human nature that more corruption and extravagance have not existed with such opportunities. But how can

economy be advanced when the officer who orders all purchases also appoints the purchasing agent, audits the bills, and reports the transaction? How can we expect salaries or the number of employés to be reduced, how can we hope that neglect and cruelty will be prevented, when every officer who can take part in reform has favorites in the asylum, and is pledged to stand by the management and to keep its damaging secrets? We might as well expect the House of Lords to surrender its prerogatives, or members of Congress to abandon their patronage, or city commissioners to reduce the salaries of their subordinates.

Despite so bad a system, however, there have been admirable superintendents and prudent trustees under it, just as under the Jesuit system there have been worthy priests, and, under our partisan spoils system, honest and capable officers; but only because so many men are better than these systems, and long for reforms from which the system holds them back.

We cannot understand the ability and tendency of this asylum system to resist reform from without until we look further to the national confederation of all its isolated despotisms. More than a generation ago "The American Association of Medical Superintendents of Asylums" was formed. Though having noble aims, it was really a combination for mutual support and self-defense by a great number of isolated officials. While producing able essays and doing much good in certain directions, the association has tended to become a power as autocratic and domineering in asylum medicine and asylum politics throughout the Union, as are the authorities of each institution behind their own walls and locks. The members of the association know, and feel compelled to keep, all the secrets of partisan favoritism, jobbing, and extravagance of which asylum trustees are guilty. Its members open and shut asylum gates to young doctors, and educate and recommend those doctors who alone have a chance of rising to the dignity and profit of an asylum superintendency. In the able organ of the association, "The American Journal of Insanity," naturally enough published at the asylum at Utica,—the recognized center of asylum politics in New York,—and edited by its superintendent, those not educated within asylum walls are sneered at as disqualified to speak of asylum affairs. That journal also lately deprecated the report of a superintendent of an asylum in Indiana, who had so fully stated asylum expenses and methods—after

English models—that outsiders could judge of the doings within its walls. In the debates of the association, abuses for which superintendents and trustees are responsible are substantially ignored. Much regret was expressed when the censures of Dr. Bucknill, the great English alienist, upon needless restraint, punishment, and secrecy in our asylums, lately forced a unique debate on that subject at an annual meeting. How could it be otherwise? The superintendents represent, not the inmates, not the people, not helplessness that needs protection, but only those in authority who maintain all secrecy, who are responsible for all that is wrong, who are interested in all that is corrupt, who are themselves the very persons who need to feel the force of public opinion and to have their doings inspected and laid open to view. A Howard or a Francis d'Assisi, as a superintendent, might expose the abuses of the asylum that employed him, or arraign a fellow-member for oppression, but, as average human nature is, it was inevitable that an association thus organized should crystalize old methods and abuses, and become, in itself, an obstacle to reform.

We have no space to state how far, in Massachusetts, Vermont, New York, and other States, lately, provision has been made for inspection and publicity in asylum affairs.

It is a curious fact that the very year (1845) when that association crystalized asylum despotism in the United States, the British Parliament pursued a precisely opposite policy by subjecting the English system to regulation, inspection, and responsibility to public opinion, at the hands of a "National Board of Commissioners in Lunacy." It extended to asylums, both public and private, the same guarantees of fidelity and justice which we long since found essential in the analogous cases of banks, prisons, and assurance companies, and are now extending to public charities.

The board consists of eleven persons, of whom three are physicians, three lawyers, and the residue men of business. Doctors not biased by asylum sympathies are to watch those who are. Lawyers are to look to the legal rights of the inmates. The non-professional majority of the board are to stand for business economy and the humanity of the nation. A board thus constituted can hardly yield to any clique of doctors or theory of medicine. The duty of the board is to cause the light to shine on all asylum management, and to bring the doings of superin-

tendents and trustees alike to the tests of science, economy, humanity, and justice. Pages might be filled with proofs of the good influence of the board, in the words of both English and foreign writers. Those familiar with the great reforms brought about by our recent boards of charities in almshouses, county jails, and poor-houses, can readily imagine how English asylums have been regenerated—no more despotism, no more secrecy, no more extravagance, no more lobbying, no more asylum politics.

Every house, hospital, asylum, or place where lunatics are kept is subject to the approval and the visitations of the board. The detailed rules for the government of each, and lists of the diet required to be supplied, must be hung in conspicuous places upon its walls and filed with the board. Not an inmate can be received or discharged anywhere in the kingdom without a prompt report to that body of the authority and the reasons; nor the death of a lunatic happen without an instant statement of the cause and the name of the physician in charge being sent to the board. Six times a year in most sections, and four times elsewhere, an inspection must be made by the board of every asylum, public and private. The inspections must be not only of the main buildings but of "every out-house and place," and the inspectors on each occasion "*must see every patient.*" They must make minutes of the situation "*in general and particular,*" not only in the visitors' book of the institution, but in their own report. It is a misdemeanor on the part of superintendent or trustees to fail to show the inspectors, and of the inspectors to omit to see, *any place or person* which it is thus their duty to see! Every medical adviser who resides in or visits an asylum must enter in a case-book the bodily and mental condition of such patient, and what medicine and treatment and at what time he prescribes for him. These books are always inspected, are open to visitors, and frequently copies of them are required by the board. Every letter of an inmate addressed to the board, or to a member of it, must be at once forwarded to its address, unopened; and every other letter, if not forwarded to its address, must be speedily delivered to the inspectors for the board. Every person guilty of neglect or ill treatment of a patient is to be punished as for a misdemeanor. The humanity and justice of such provisions must commend them to the American heart.

It is obvious that inspections of all vouchers and accounts by an independent body must tend to economy on the part of

trustees and superintendents, to say nothing of having the expenses of each institution put in comparison with those of others in the annual reports of the board.

Asylums are neither built nor altered in England to suit the fancy of local trustees or superintendents, but upon plans to be approved by central authority, and with stern limitations upon extravagances. The prescriptions of treatment, the diet lists, the suicides, the punishments, the constraints of liberty, the accidents, the ratio of cures and deaths, the conduct of superintendents as shown in the calmness or excitement of their patients, in the different institutions, and the results of looking into the complaints made by letter, appear in these reports and are scored up against an institution according to its merits. It is plain enough that as checks upon arbitrary power, as incentives to justice and economy, and as sources of public enlightenment, such reports must be salutary in the highest degree. By removing secrecy and mystery from asylum management, the action of the board has greatly raised asylum affairs in public estimation. Suspicion and distrust on the subject no longer exist, as in this country, and English and German alienists and statesmen see, with surprise, the dread with which our asylum authorities look upon publicity and investigation. In those countries, such scenes as we witness would be impossible. For example: a great New York asylum superintendent, paid from the public treasury, leaving his patients last winter locked in charge of subordinates, while he visited Albany to lead the asylum influence against a bill for the better protection of the insane; a minister of the Gospel standing but yesterday before the Senate committee before referred to, and holding in his hand a letter from a superintendent over him, which admonished him in direct words that he had passed the asylum locks *only on the condition of revealing no secrets*, and that he would speak out the facts as to abuses at the peril of his place as a Christian missionary to a public lunatic asylum in the city of New York! Such, in their decisive features, are the widely different systems according to which lunacy affairs have been managed for more than a generation on the opposite sides of the Atlantic. On the one side, the only national organization having been a body made up of superintendents and trustees, interested if not in part formed to preserve them in the exercise of their despotic power against the complaints of its victims and the protests of

the public; on the other side, a body independent of superintendents and trustees alike, and both formed and interested to bring them to the bar of public opinion, and to secure for every lunatic in their care all the comfort and justice which a great nation can supply.

It is not strange that superintendents and trustees oppose such inspection and publicity. But why should they, any more than bank and insurance directors and presidents, be exempt? The wonder is, not that lunacy administration here should be more tyrannical, expensive, and distrusted than in Europe, that physical restraint and punishments should be more frequent and excessive, that suppression of letters and secrecy should be enforced, or that insanity should increase and become incurable in the degree that our asylum management has fallen behind the science and humanity of the age; but the wonder is that a humane and intelligent people should have so long, with the example of Europe before their eyes, tolerated a system repugnant to their constitutions and national spirit. We may be sure that a system so intrenched in the statutes and in professional, partisan, and local interests all over the country, will not be easily overthrown. But difficult as the work may be, the most essential step toward reform is to open all the asylums, public and private alike, to inspection and reports by an independent board (after the British model), either created separately in each State, or made up of members from several States, for a common duty. Then asylum extravagance, asylum despotism, and asylum politics will fall before public opinion; but not before. All reforms short of this must deal mainly with effects, and not with the real causes of our evils.

DORMAN B. ELATON.